

REVISITING THE DISCOURSE
OF THE MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT IN HONG KONG*

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1 Another Picture of the May Fourth Movement: *Chen Junbao's Diary*

It has been over 90 years since the May Fourth Movement occurred in 1919. Because of its widespread influence on Chinese contemporary history, considerable research has been carried out on “the May Fourth” and its development. Moreover, since 1979, localized studies carried out in cities other than Beijing have provided further insight into the movement. A number of research books had been published, for example, on the *May Fourth Movement* in Shanghai (1960), in Beijing (1979), in Zhejiang (1979), in Shandong (1980), in Henan (1983), in Jiangxi (1989), in Guangdong (1989), in Sichuan (1989), in Jiangsu (1992), and even in Japan (2003).¹

The above studies demonstrate the great impact that the May Fourth Movement has had on research in China and beyond. Meanwhile, despite the fact that Hong Kong's location is far away from Beijing, it too was affected, with echoes of the movement resonating within this former British colony to this day.

Research points out that during the period of the student movement the general public, particularly those who were not in Beijing, simply deemed the development to be a political exercise – a patriotic demonstration against imperialism. It was not recognized as a new cultural movement (*Wusi xinwenhua yundong* 五四新文化運動) until much later.² This situation was similar in Hong Kong. The May Fourth Movement – especially its cultural iconoclasm and call for enlightenment – did not in fact affect Hong Kong before 1930.³ At best, it caught the attention of small groups of intellectu-

* An earlier version of this article was published in Chinese in Hong Kong in 2012; see Chen Xunran 2012.

1 Shanghai shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo 1960; Peng Ming 1979; Zhonggong Zhejiang shengwei dangxiao dangshi jiaoyanshi 1979; Hu Wenben and Tian Keshan 1980; Pang Shouxin and Lin Huanfen 1983; Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Jiangxi Sheng weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui 1989; Sha Dongxun 1989; Zhonggong Sichuan shengwei dangshi gongzuo weiyuanhui 1989; Zhongguo di'er lishi dang'anguan 1992; Ono Shinji 2003.

2 Wang Fansen 2009, 52.

3 Chen Xueran, 2014, 188–197.

als based there. Even the anti-imperialism aspect of the May Fourth Movement had a limited response in Hong Kong at that time.

As Chen Junbao 陳君葆 (1898–1982), who was studying at the University of Hong Kong at the time of the May Fourth Movement, recalled:

The upsurging patriotic mood of “the May Fourth” pervaded much of China. Hong Kong also got hit but it was very mild, mild, and certainly in no way a shock.⁴

Chen was directly affected by the May Fourth Movement. At this time of national calamity, he threw in his lot with the Beijing students. He tried to submit a petition in the name of the University of Hong Kong with 50 other fellow students that called for China’s sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference. Their actions, however, were prohibited by the University. They then sent a telegram in the name of the “Hong Kong Chinese Students” to students of various Beijing universities, in which they voiced their complete support for their Beijing counterparts. They also severely condemned “the treasonable act of Cao [Rulin 曹汝霖, 1877–1966] and Zhang [Zongxiang 章宗祥, 1879–1962]” (*Cao Zhang mai guo* 曹章賣國), the two high-ranking Chinese officials who capitulated to the Japanese and signed the “Twenty-One Demands” (*Ershiyi tiao* 二十一條) in 1915. In the telegram, they further requested the Beijing government to issue a command to the Chinese emissary, Gu Weijun 顧維鈞 (1888–1985). It was “not to sign, (but) to abrogate the Sino-Japanese secret treaties from beginning to end, (and thereby) wipe out the national disgrace.” Their text came to the attention of Beijing students Yang Lianggong 楊亮工 and Cai Xiaozhou 蔡曉舟 and was promptly compiled in *Wusi: Diyiben Wusi Yundong shiliao* 五四: 第一本五四運動史料 (The First Issue of May Fourth Historiography), first published in 1919.⁵ This revealed that the main theme of “the May Fourth” – “Fighting for sovereignty externally, eliminating traitors internally” (*wai zheng zhuquan, nei chu guozai* 外爭主權, 內除國賊) – was not lost upon the Hong Kong students, putting them in solidarity with Beijing’s students in their desire to rescue their country. By clearly displaying their concern and patriotism, the Hong Kong students’ written words not only articulated their support. They also expressed the students’ aim to make a meaningful contribution to Hong Kong.

Some of the views in Chen Junbao’s *Diary* and reminiscences related to the May Fourth Movement were critical. The common understanding of the May Fourth Movement suggests that the movement not only promoted anti-imperialistic and anti-Japanese sentiments but also successfully introduced the positive influences of democracy and modern science to China. While affirming the value of the patriotic spirit

4 Xie Ronggun 2008 [1959], 38.

5 Yang Lianggong and Cai Xiaozhou 1982, 139–140.

against imperialism and Japan, Chen Junbao noted that the “democracy” and “science” aspects of the movement had little to no impact on Hong Kong and, similarly, made little headway in China’s major cities. The aim of Chen Junbao’s testimony is to keep reminding his compatriots that their goal of cultural enlightenment has still not yet been achieved. This accurately reflects the gist of Chen Junbao’s articles pertaining to the uneven support of the movement’s ideals in Hong Kong. Additionally, Chen’s recollections also reveal that the cultural impact of the May Fourth Movement on Hong Kong was very limited and spread slowly. It can thus be observed that the political messages of anti-imperialism and anti-Japanese sentiment commonly overshadowed the actual lack of cultural progress in the areas of democracy and science. Therefore, the majority of research on May Fourth in fact reflects this reality, for it emphasizes the former rather than the latter. The public ignored Chen Junbao’s diary and other personal testimony while the reflections of another writer, Chen Qian 陳謙, *Wusi Yundong zai Xianggang de huiyi* 五四運動在香港的回憶 [Memory of May Fourth Movement in Hong Kong], have become quite popular and are widely accepted by the public and contemporary historians alike.⁶ Following the publication of the book, which was written solely based on Chen Qian’s memories, it became an essential reference for scholars studying the Modern History of Hong Kong. Moreover, the book’s observations about narrating Hong Kong’s history in 1919 and the progress of the dissemination of the May Fourth Movement have been frequently cited and adopted.⁷ Consequently, Chen Qian’s book – published by the National Committee of Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference – has effectively become the official interpretation of Hong Kong’s role in the May Fourth Movement.

2 An Exaggerative Narration: The Recollections of Chen Qian

Since Chen Qian’s study of the May Fourth Movement in Hong Kong, the interpretations of the event up until now have been fairly consistent. They have emphasized Chinese patriotism and anti-imperialism. Due in part to Chen Qian’s account, the “patriotism” of Hong Kong was viewed within the context of the wider national movement against imperialism. May Fourth in Hong Kong was thus considered the same as the May

6 Chen Qian 1979, 40–45.

7 Liu Shuyong 1987, 32–34; Jin Yingxi 1988, 175–178; He Hongjing 1994, 117–118; Yang Xiaoshan 1996, 38–40; Lin Qingyuan and Li Jingduan 1997, 96–98; Guangjiaojing 1989, 78–81; Liu Xiaoqing and Liu Xiaodian 1997, 364–365; A Yi, 1997, 74–75; Deng Kaisong and Lu Xiaomin 1997, 135; Yang Renfei 1999, 162–163; Cai Rongfang 2001, 106; Deng Kaisong 2010, 164–165.

Fourth in rest of the country.⁸ According to Chen, the following is what happened during the May Fourth movement in Hong Kong:

At that time, residents of Wanchai swarmed to the Japanese stores and threw stones to break the display windows. They shouted out a slogan for boycotting Japanese merchandise. The police tried to suppress the crowd, but they kept protesting for several hours. There was no alternative but to advise the shops to suspend business, while persuading the Japanese to stay home to prevent further incidents. Moreover, impassioned speeches about the national disgrace were delivered by language teachers from every private Chinese school in order to stir and inspire a nationalism. Also, lectures were delivered focusing on the promotion and consumption of local goods and on boycotting Japanese brands. Japanese property was forcibly removed from homes on Lyndhurst Terrace in Central and Hollywood Road closed to the Central Police Station and afterwards burned in public by students as a sign of their determination. Furthermore, housewives stopped using matches from Japanese brand “Zhongxin” with the monkey logotype. Chinese merchants gathered at association offices and resolved to promote the sale of local goods. Department stores such as Sincere, Wing On, The Sun, and Zhenguang [真光] declared they would purchase more local silk and groceries from Suzhou and Hangzhou in the future. They welcomed citizens to carry out inspection on whether there were Japanese goods for sale (as some stores openly advocated for local goods but in fact continued to secretly sell Japanese goods). Both indanthrene cotton cloth and patriotic homemade cloth became very popular.⁹

This passage from Chen Qian claims that Hong Kong, similar to the neighbouring, major Chinese city, Guangzhou and other major cities, inherited the spirit of “fighting for sovereignty externally, eliminating traitors internally.” Hong Kong was of one mind with the rest of the Chinese population: It was strongly opposed to imperialism and Japan, and indignant about the present state of national humiliation. Chen Qian described the response of Hong Kong’s British government, which instructed the police to protect the Japanese and quell the mass demonstrations when anti-Japanese sentiment erupted. As for the Japanese, a naval fleet was dispatched to Hong Kong to quickly bring an end to the expanding boycott through intimidation:

After the incident, the Hong Kong-British authority worried the situation would get worse, and thus immediately took emergency measures such as cancelling all days off for the entire police force, irrespective of nationality (British, Indian or Chinese); intensifying armed police patrols and standing guard around-the-clock at the Japanese stores in

8 Chen Qian 1979, 40–41.

9 Ibid.

Wanchai; and mounting guard over the Japanese expats and their family dependants and serving them with food and water. To prevent incidents, even the Chinese reserves of the Hong Kong Auxiliary Police Force, who were recruited during the First World War and dismissed after 1918, were now mobilized again, equipped with sufficient firearms and patrolling at night, guarding areas around Garden Road up to Kennedy Road and down to Queen's Road East ending at Arsenal Street. As for the Japanese government, they made a threat of force by sending the latest models of three giant warships – the “Nagato”, the “Mutsu”, and the “Fuso” – and anchoring them off Lei Yue Mun. Their cannons were aimed at Hong Kong to intimidate and alarm the local people. What is more, the Japanese consul stationed in Hong Kong presented a memo to the Hong Kong Education Department which demanded them to dispatch Chinese inspectors to observe all private Chinese schools. They were to forbid (the schools) from using “Chudeng lunwen shuofan” 初等論文說範 [Elementary Illustration and Demonstration of Essay], published by Shanghai Huiwentang 上海會文堂, as a textbook because of its anti-Japanese content. (The Japanese consul) believed the content would damage Japan's reputation and impair bilateral relations between Great Britain and Japan.¹⁰

Chen Qian's recollections, which describe the anti-Japanese sentiment and the general boycott by Hong Kong's public, show us a picture of the colony in those years. The famous Chinese historian Jin Yingxi makes direct use of Chen Qian's recollections as a first-hand, eyewitness account of what went on in May 1919 in Hong Kong:

The “May Fourth” Movement of Beijing convulsed the nation [...] young Hong Kong students and citizens flung themselves into this anti-imperialistic movement quickly [...] Chinese teachers in every secondary school and university expounded the national humiliation of the unequal “Twenty-One-Demands” treaty during classes [...] Wanchai residents swarmed to the Japanese stores and staged demonstrations [...] breaking the shop windows [...] the Japanese government made a threat of force by sending the latest models of three giant warships: the Nagato, the Mutsu and the Fuso, anchoring off Lei Yue Mun with their cannons aimed at Hong Kong to intimidate and alarm the local people [...].¹¹

Not only have historians considered Chen Qian's recollections to be an accurate and truthful reflection of the events of May Fourth in Hong Kong, Chinese official bodies and organizations have accepted, adopted, and even promoted his account. The aim has been not only to document official regional history, but also to indicate the emerging connec-

10 Chen Qian 1979, 42–43).

11 Jin Yingxi 1988, 175–177.

tion of the working class in Hong Kong to those in the Mainland, implying the nascent beginning of the Socialist movement:

Wanchai residents throw stones at the Japanese stores. They boycotted and burned Japanese merchandise. Three Japanese warships navigated to Lei Yue Mun to demonstrate their military power. Chinese reserves of the Hong Kong Auxiliary Police Force were called up by the British colonial administration to guard the Japanese. Laborers have started to organize their associations since then [...].¹²

When Chen wrote his memoir, he admitted that he was not certain of the accuracy of his memory due to the sixty year gap between what had happened and when he started writing.¹³ In spite of this fact, his account spread far and wide among scholars and was regarded as an important document for the study of May Fourth in Hong Kong. To demonstrate just how heavily quoted Chen Qian's recollection has become, it is worth citing two examples. The first is from College of Charleston professor, Jung-fang Tsai:

May 4, 1919, after the Beijing student movement broke out [...] armed police were called out by the British colonial administration to patrol and stand guard, day and night, around the Japanese stores in order to prevent the incident from worsening [...] the Japanese government sent out warships, the Nagato, the Mutsu and the Fuso anchoring off Lei Yue Mun to intimidate and alarm the local people.¹⁴

The second example and most recent use of Chen Qian's recollections comes from a publication by a professor from Guangdong Social Science Academy, Deng Kaisong:

Hong Kong compatriots gave their support in various ways [...] the Japanese government dispatched warships to Lei Yue Mun, with their cannons targeted at Hong Kong to intimidate and alarm the local people; The British colonial administration worried the situation would worsen, and thus took precautions to protect the Japanese, on the one hand, while warning citizens, teachers, and students that they would not tolerate any boycott, on the other [...] the May Fourth Movement had far-reaching effects on the societies of both Guangdong and Hong Kong [...].¹⁵

Prior to Chen Qian's statement about recounting the consequences of May Fourth, there was no record to indicate the supposed impact of the event. However, Chen Qian's account caused a paradigm shift in the perception of academics and politicians about Hong Kong's role in the movement. His recollection of May Fourth provided evidence of the

12 Guangdong shengli Zhongshan tushuguan 2002, 102.

13 Chen Qian 1979, 40.

14 Cai Rongfang 2001, 102–104.

15 Deng Kaisong 2010, 164–165.

anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, anti-Japanese sentiment of Hong Kong's citizens and revealed their patriotism, despite having to live under colonial rule. Nonetheless, some aspects of Chen Qian's statement are open to debate. Chen Qian, for instance, generally compressed incidents that actually took place in different years.

3 Revisiting the Discourse of the May Fourth Movement

While there was in fact intense anti-Japanese sentiment in the last century in Hong Kong, it was utterly different from Chen Qian's description. After searching through all of the Hong Kong newspapers and the Colonial Office's historical documents in those early years, glaring discrepancies can be found between what Chen Qian recalled and what really happened.

3.1 Boycott Action in the Street in 1928

In 1919, the popular wave May Fourth set into motion certainly aroused the attention of Hong Kong's inhabitants, yet it did not lead to any large-scale boycott against Japan in the city's industrial sector between 1919 and 1925. According to the newspaper reports, Hong Kong's population (including its businessmen) decided not to buy or sell goods. They did not actually "boycott" Japanese goods. There are neither newspaper articles nor government historical documents that record any violent boycott actions relating to May Fourth. As described above, the May Fourth Movement in 1919 only had a slight impact on Hong Kong. Therefore, Chen Junbao's recollection from 1959 seems to be more accurate than Chen Qian's:

No extensive demonstrations took place; there were, however, small pockets of people sporadically holding "oil-paper umbrellas" [*you zhi san* 油紙傘] in marches. However, the slogans that were written on top of the oil-paper umbrellas such as "Boycott Japanese merchandise" and "Promote local products" were not worded aggressively.¹⁶

His testimony is borne out by the *Huazi ribao* 華字日報, a popular Chinese newspaper of the time, which reported on the march on June 4, 1919. In addition, other English newspapers like the *South China Morning Post*, the *China Mail*, the *Hong Kong Telegraph*, and the *Hong Kong Daily Press* also reported on this incident in detail. The march was held by a group of nine young students, ranging in age from 8 to 17, who were dressed in white school uniforms. They were "walking slowly" while holding oil-paper umbrellas bearing the inscription "National Goods." The students were promptly arrested, however. "People passing by were outraged" since the students "committed no violent action but

16 Xie Ronggun 2008 [1959], 384.

were unreasonably arrested by the police”.¹⁷ All the newspapers mentioned above continued reporting on the story after the students were arrested, brought to trial, and fined. Judging from these newspapers, there are only a few incidents concerning the boycott of Japanese goods that were reported on between May 1919 and the end of year. Their subsequent articles moreover reported that the commercial sectors, academic circles, and the public who joined in the boycott of Japanese goods kept a low profile.¹⁸ As a result of the rigorous control of the British colonial administration at the early stages of the movement, these actions had to be planned and carried out behind the scenes.

As mentioned earlier, there was no large-scale May Fourth demonstration in Hong Kong. Although some boycott actions did take place after 1920, organized boycotts were rare. Merchants and the public only adopted the attitude of “no sell, no buy” towards Japanese goods. For example, a news report of “South China Morning Post” was quoted in *Huazi ribao* on May 9, 1923 in which several Hong Kong Chinese merchandisers including Sincere admitted that they sympathized with the boycott of Japanese goods due to the refusal of the Japanese government in abrogating the treaty of “Twenty-One-Demands.” The boycott was not only a show of patriotism, but also due to the fact that “Chinese goods” from the Mainland, America and Germany were cheap and attractive. During the period from 1919 to May 1928, the citizens of Hong Kong did not actually “swarm” to Japanese stores and throw stones to break the display windows; police did not advise the “Japanese stores to keep doors and windows closed and suspend business” or advise the Japanese to “stay inside to prevent accidents”; and Hong Kong students did not forcibly take any Japanese property out from their homes in areas around the Central Police station or “threaten to burn it up in public to show their determination.” By the same token, the drastic behaviour described by Chen Qian did in fact occur in 1928. The incident that triggered it, however, was not the wave of May Fourth but rather the “Tragedy of Jinan” (*Jinan can'an* 濟南慘案) on May 3, 1928, when more than 6,000 Chinese soldiers and civilians were shot dead by the Japanese Imperial Army.

The news of this tragedy touched off anti-Japanese sentiment among the people of Hong Kong. According to one newspaper report:

After the tragedy happened, our compatriots were infuriated. Economic relations with Japan were broken off on the Mainland and the voices against Japan became more agitated. Compatriots tried to aid the Jinan victims [...] Hong Kong’s citizens also participated actively.¹⁹

17 *The China Mail*, June 4, 1919.

18 *Huazi ribao*, May 26, June 12, December 27, 1919.

19 *Huazi ribao*, May 21, 1928.

During the final ten days of May, display cases of Japanese stores were continually destroyed by stones and Japanese expatriates were attacked. In order to prevent further deterioration of Anglo-Japanese relations, the British colonial administration took every possible measure to stop the spread of the unrest, described in two newspaper articles of *Huazi ribao* on May 21 and 22, respectively:

The authority had already paid special attention to those streets that have Japanese stores and on-duty patrols were instructed to take strict precaution; the same was true for Kowloon. As for Wanchai, one Indian police officer and two Indian guards were dispatched to watch over Japanese stores this morning.²⁰

Another newspaper article reported on the official comments from a colonial judge in reaction to the actions of Hong Kong's citizens:

The judge briefly cautioned the public in court: "I understand the indignant feelings of the Chinese over the Tragedy of Jinan, which has sparked a ferocious hatred of the Japanese. However, Hong Kong is a city ruled by law and remains neutral; there is no tolerance for anyone acting against the law or causing a disturbance. There is an earnest hope that Hong Kong residents can abide by the law, and live and work in peace and contentment."²¹

Despite reinforcements to the police force and the fines that were issued to the offenders, the anti-Japanese sentiment did not cease. A newspaper article dated May 24 reported that

Since Japan dispatch(ed) troops to Shandong, and (in response to) the occurrence of The Tragedy of Jinan, the Chinese people threw stones to break the Japanese store-front windows. Several offenders were arrested and prosecuted.

In response to this, patrols by police were intensified with the aim of protecting the life and property of the Japanese. Hence, "around 10 armed police officers were formed as a team and dispatched on patrol every day," leading to a decrease in sales at the Japanese businesses.²² In the following days after the Tragedy of Jinan, the aforementioned newspaper articles reported on Hong Kong as well as the various boycott activities of Japanese goods throughout Southeast Asia.²³

Hong Kong was not the only place besides China to react strongly against the Japanese army's actions in Jinan. The descriptions above strongly contradict Chen Qian's observation that the disturbance towards Japan was caused by May Fourth. In fact, it was

20 *Huazi ribao*, May 22, 1928.

21 *Huazi ribao*, May 21, 1928.

22 *Huazi ribao*, May 24, 1928.

23 *Huazi ribao*, May 24, 29, 31, June 1, 2, 12, 13, 1928.

attributed to The Tragedy of Jinan during the period of May to June 1928. Moreover, there were inaccuracies in Chen Qian's recollections regarding the problem of Japanese naval vessels in both the timeline and in terms of the historical facts.

3.2 A Flawed Narration of "Historical Facts":

The Problem of Japanese Naval Vessels

Chen Qian mentioned that the Japanese government had dispatched three giant warships to Hong Kong for the purpose of intimidation after the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement in 1919. When looking at several publications from the time period, it is not difficult to find mistakes in his recollections. First, it was impossible for the three warships, "Nagato" なかと, 長門, "Mutsu" むつ, 陸奥 and "Fuso" ふそう, 扶桑, to appear together in Hong Kong in 1919. Scholars with knowledge of the history of the development of pre-war Japanese history might also be expected to know the following facts: As some of the most advanced naval vessels of their time, the three warships were the product of a whirlwind of technological progress. During the first part of the last century, Japan, along with the Western powers, was in a race for naval hegemony in the South China Sea and the Pacific.²⁴ Apart from "Fuso," the other two warships were still being built in 1919.²⁵ Their first group voyage to Hong Kong was in April 1928, albeit for the purposes of an "official visit" and a "militarily interflow," it was not for "intimidation." Chinese and Western newspaper reporting of the time sufficiently prove this point.

The *South China Morning Post* dated April 10, 1928 had the headline, "The Japanese Fleet: Giant Warships in Harbour on Five Days Visit." It also included extensive coverage on the arrival of the warships and explicitly reported that, after arriving in Hong Kong at 11:00 am on April 9, 1928, the fleet started its 5-day "official visit" with a greeting from the British Army commander, government officials, and the Japanese community in Hong Kong.²⁶ Similar coverage was also presented by the *Huaqiao ribao* 華僑日報, dated April 10, 11, and 12. It reported on the welcoming ceremony provided by the British Army commander and the Hong Kong governor, while including several pictures of the occasion.²⁷

24 Katagiri Daiji, 1997, 27, 37.

25 Nagato (Completed in 1920) and Mutsu (Completed in 1921) were called "The Signature of Pre-war Japanese Navy". The former one was the flagship of the Commander-In-Chief of the Combined Fleet (*rengō kantai shirei* Yamamoto Isoroku 聯合艦隊司令山本五十六); the later one was the main fleet at the rear of the Battle of Midway (Midowē kaisen 中途島戰役). Katagiri Daiji, 1997, 27, 37.

26 *South China Morning Post*, April 10, 1928.

27 *Huaqiao ribao*, April 10, 11, 12, 1928.

On the day after the warships' arrival, the news headlines were as follows:

1. More than a thousand Japanese naval men, accompanied by the British Army, landed for 'tour and visit'.
2. British and Japanese battle planes performed joint aerial acrobatics for 'around half an hour, and it was wonderful'.
3. The whole Japanese Navy was invited and present at various feasts.
4. Open day of Japanese warships attracted more than a thousand Chinese.²⁸

These reports reflect that the Japanese Navy was warmly received during its visit. Apart from this, the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce also paid tribute to the captains of the Japanese Navy at noon on April 13.²⁹

News of the Japanese warships' official visit was widely covered by every news publication. To be sure, the occasion of "no less than a thousand Chinese people paying visit to the warships" must have been spectacular. That said, there is a wide divergence between this reporting and the picture that has been portrayed in recent years by the area of study of Hong Kong history and the current discourse on the May Fourth Movement in Hong Kong. In fact, in the 20 years up to 1919, the Japanese warships frequently patrolled Southeast Asia during early last century, including going into port in Hong Kong. They were enthusiastically received by the British colonial administration, as Hong Kong was the entrepôt between the Japanese warships and their colonies in Taiwan and Vietnam as well as the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. Furthermore, Japanese civilian vessels utilized the port city at an extremely high rate. The relatively large number of 1,148 vessels in the year of 1919 made use of Hong Kong's facilities. This stands in contrast to the 854 Chinese vessels, 150 American vessels, and 8 Russian vessels that made use of Hong Kong facilities that same year.³⁰

The circumstances described above were connected to the Anglo-Japanese allied treaties from the period of 1902 to August 1923. The alliance was forged to hinder the expansion of Russian influence in the Far East. Despite the narrow nature of the treaty, the two powers ensured that their alliance would be conducted diplomatically (while it lasted) due to the complex geopolitical environment of the time. On the premise of maintaining Anglo-Japanese relations, the British colonial administration had zero tolerance of any anti-Japanese movement at any level in Hong Kong. Moreover, by enforcing the treaty, the British government as well as the British colonial administration would not permit Japanese warships to target Hong Kong. Since there was no

28 *Huaqiao ribao*, April 12, 1928.

29 *Huaqiao ribao*, April 11, 1928.

30 Hong Kong Government, 1919, 9.

threat to its nationals living in Hong Kong during 1919, the Japanese government would not have gone to war with her ally, especially given the conditions of the Anglo-Japanese treaty. The statement of Japanese warships threatening Hong Kong after the breakout of the May Fourth Movement in 1919 therefore seems highly absurd.

Nevertheless, sporadic boycotts against Japanese goods did take place from 1919 to 1927. Due to the quick actions of the British colonial administration to ease the problem, the anti-Japanese sentiment did not escalate. This would explain why the Hong Kong governor had no correspondence with the British Colonial Secretary (Yingguo zhiminbu 英國殖民地部) about the problem. The British colonial administration was deliberately cautious at the early stages, and the riot control experience it had gained by handling the unpredictable large-scale anti-Japanese movement during the year of 1908 could be put to good use.

For instance, in February 1908, the Chinese Navy intercepted the Japanese vessel “Tatsu Maru” (たつまる, 二辰丸), which was smuggling ammunition in Chinese territorial waters. China, however, was nonetheless compelled to accept a number of humiliating demands, including apologizing to Japan, paying an indemnity for the loss of the Japanese vessel, and reprimanding the Chinese officials involved in the arrest. Hong Kong newspapers such as *The China Mail* (Chinese name: *Dechenxi bao* 德臣西報) and *Huazi ribao* published several news stories about this event in mid-February. When the news reached Guangdong,

[...] the public was infuriated, the masses were enraged; strikes, riots and boycotts against Japanese goods were brewing.³¹

The anti-Japanese movement in Guangzhou further stimulated the nationalism of Hong Kong merchants and citizens, sparking an anti-Japanese movement that was far larger in scale than the one that came about during the May Fourth Movement, 11 years later. The anti-Japanese sentiments reached a climax during November 1–3, when nearly one thousand Hong Kong residents staged an uprising and continuously destroyed the Japanese stores located at Sai Ying Pun and Hollywood Road. The British government and colonial administration ordered the Hong Kong police and British Army troops to suppress the riot, resulting in 119 people being arrested and prosecuted.³² Nine were charged with violating Article 10 of the Security Ordinance from 1886, resulting in their expulsion from the city.³³

31 Chen Zhanyi and Yang Yongxian 2004, 71–72.

32 The situation of the riot against Japanese and the suppression by the British colonial administration on 1st and 2nd November, 1908 can be found in Badeley 1908.

33 Lugard 1908b, 547.

The Governor of Hong Kong, Frederick John Dealtry Lugard (Chinese name: Luji 盧押, 1858–1945), kept in close communication with the British Colonial Secretary until February 1909. The British colonial administration and the British government were themselves engaged in negotiating with China and Japan to find solutions and conciliation.³⁴ This serious anti-Japanese riot and the upsurging nationalism in Hong Kong alerted both the British colonial administration and the British government to an issue they were already sensitive about and sought to remedy, namely, sentiment against foreigners – not just the Japanese or other nationalities, but themselves as well. Following the lessons of 1908, the British colonial government dealt with any perceived xenophobic movements or riots swiftly. From the Japanese perspective, even though a drastic anti-Japanese movement took place in 1908, the Japanese government nonetheless did not send any warships in retaliation. There was also no indication that they would have otherwise.

It was thus clear to officials that compared to the scale of the anti-Japanese movement in 1908, the movement in Hong Kong connected to May Fourth was minor. As indicated in Chen Junbao's reminiscences and other sources, the May Fourth Movement did not seriously impact Hong Kong. Students from the University of Hong Kong, who intended to hold a demonstration, were

[...] dismissed silently. Their uproar gradually subsided, and, after they were "dissuaded" by the university, resentment was hard to swallow like a stone.³⁵

Therefore, many recent scholars of the May Fourth Movement and Hong Kong history are mistaken in their belief that

[...] students from the University of Hong Kong stirred up a wave of anti-Japanese under the push of May Fourth.³⁶

The wave of May Fourth in Hong Kong was certainly not as drastic in Guangzhou, Shanghai, or Beijing. This may be attributed to the fact that the latter cities played an important role as centres of politics, economics and culture on the Mainland, whereas Hong Kong did not. Another reason is that Hong Kong was allied to Japan as a British colony. The British colonial administration undoubtedly drew on the mistakes of the anti-Japanese riots in 1908 and its understanding of the importance of prevention rather than suppression to respond to the anti-Japanese wave of May Fourth early on. The British colonial administration, for instance, tightened control of publications in 1919 with

34 Lugard 1908a, 713–715; Macdonald 1908, 719–720.

35 Xie Ronggun 2008 [1959], 384.

36 Jin Yingxi 1988, 177.

the aim of restraining the spread of anti-Japanese sentiment. In this regard, the word “Japanese/Japan” (日 本) was usually replaced by “some” (*mou* 某) when the phrase “boycott Japanese goods” was printed. When *The Chinese Mail* reported that companies refused to sell Japanese goods, the sentence was replaced with “some companies stopped selling some countries’ products” (emphasis added).³⁷ Police patrols were intensified to discourage Hong Kong residents from posting bills in public to boycott Japanese goods. Offenders were otherwise “arrested and prosecuted” immediately, thus making clear that the “territory of Hong Kong was a possession of Great Britain, not the Mainland”.³⁸ These measures reflected the British government’s concern that the nationalistic sentiment of Hong Kong residents against the Japanese would flare up again and lead to a difficult and uncontrollable situation. The British colonial administration was very sensitive to this particular issue.

The government’s swift measures not only reflected the strategy of the British colonial administration to nip the problem in the bud in dealing with anti-Japanese sentiment of the Hong Kong population. It also revealed the British government’s concern with upholding its treaty and thus maintaining a “pro-Japanese” attitude. Three main factors influenced the British government and the colonial administration with respect to their attitude towards Hong Kong and Southern China.

First, the deep-seated problem of nationalism and the Hong Kong population’s sense of being Chinese perpetually threatened the colony’s stability. Second, slogans and banners saying “Get rid of the Westerners,” which would mysteriously and regularly appear in public, struck fear into the British government and the colonial administration. Third, the diplomatic policy towards the Kuomintang government (the Government of the Chinese Nationalist Party) was a sensitive issue for the British. The British colonial administration in Hong Kong was forced to cooperate with the Kuomintang government in Guangzhou due to their proximity and shared economic and commercial interests. However, because the British government recognized the Beiyang warlord government as the official government of China, not the Kuomintang, their relationship was tenuous and tense at best. On the other hand, the Kuomintang government’s platform promoting Chinese nationalism and patriotism undoubtedly affected Hong Kong and the British colonial administration’s ability to rule.³⁹

In light of the facts revealed by historical documents like newspaper account and government records, Chen Qian’s recollections clearly distort the visit of the Japanese warships. He interprets it as an act of intimidation in response to the anti-colonialism

37 *Huazi ribao*, May 26, 1919.

38 *Huazi ribao*, May 28, 1919.

39 Wu Lun Nixia 1994, 203–219.

and anti-imperialism aspect of May Fourth in order to amplify the historical significance of the movement in Hong Kong. Despite Chen Qian's inaccuracies, Hong Kong society seemed to be in a joyous mood during the visit of the Japanese warships in April 1928. That said, the reception would have been quite different had the same warships paid their visit after the Tragedy of Jinan in May 1928. Still, the events of anti-Japanese sentiment that occurred in Hong Kong as a result of the Tragedy of Jinan found their way into Chen Qian's account of May Fourth in Hong Kong.

All together, these inaccuracies in Chen Qian's account have resulted in a confusion of the past, especially with regard to historical studies. This unsupported account – indeed, this reconstruction of historical events – has invariably led to faulty interpretations of Hong Kong's history and a violation of the principle of historical accuracy. Perhaps historical data was difficult to collect, or perhaps scholars were especially keen to prove the patriotic sentiments of Hong Kong's citizens under the governance of colonialism. This would make the recollections of Chen Qian and related arguments highly compelling to researchers. It is no surprise, then, that a large number of works have quoted Chen's account and used it as dispositive evidence. The following texts on the historical study of Hong Kong, for instance, innocently incorporate Chen Qian's account:

The “May Fourth Movement” had a great impact on Hong Kong. The anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism movement started to penetrate into society, and the community appearance and social atmosphere changed significantly [...] as on the Mainland, the “May Fourth” New Culture Movement was springing up in Hong Kong.⁴⁰

Another text on the history of Hong Kong demonstrates the extent and influence of Chen Qian's recollection:

Hong Kong students actively responded to the protests [...] the British colonial administration took the “pro-Japanese” approach and adopted heavy-handed policies to restrict demonstrations [...] regardless, “May Fourth” nevertheless changed Hong Kong tremendously to the extent that students in English colleges started dressing in Western suits and abandoned the old attire of the late Qing dynasty's.⁴¹

In response to the above, cursory research on Hong Kong students' attire shows that it was in fact quite varied. A historical photo from Queen's College clearly demonstrates that students were already dressing in Western suits by 1912. Furthermore, there were many newspaper reports in 1919 that showed the tendency of Hong Kong residents to

40 Lin Qingyuan and Li Jingduan 1997, 98.

41 A Yi 1997, 75.

wear western-style clothing. The idea, therefore, that students “started dressing in suits” in the wake of May Fourth hardly seems credible.⁴²

If we can say that Chen Qian’s portrayal of May Fourth in Hong Kong is categorically wrong, there were reasons why Chen Qian did what he did. It is important to bear in mind that Chen Qian was trying to remember what he saw 60 years ago when he was only 16 years old. His recollections, therefore, may not be accurate due to his fading memories. But, then, perhaps he wanted to strengthen relations between China and Hong Kong, following the motto “blood is thicker than water”? (*xue nong yu shui* 血濃於水). Or maybe he hoped to expose the evils of imperialism and colonialism in China and Hong Kong? It is also conceivable that he only wanted to highlight the profound significance of the May Fourth Movement and in some way connect Hong Kong to that event. In relating a counterfactual narrative in which the people of Hong Kong were being held under siege by both Great Britain and Japan, he could easily magnify the otherwise enormous impact of the May Fourth Movement and thus contribute to the nationalistic fervor. Undeniably, most of his comments on the development of the May Fourth Movement in Hong Kong reflect his patriotism. There is also no doubt that a number of current scholars, historians and researchers have been filled with nationalistic sentiments after reading Chen Qian’s testimony. Apart from nationalism, the political thoughts and ideology of different political parties, the Left and the Right, may have affected the thinking of numerous scholars in the past, resulting in several different depictions of the May Fourth Movement. From this perspective, it is clear that Chen Junbao was not moved very much by any particular political view. Instead of focusing on the details of the protests and boycotts in Hong Kong, he placed more emphasis on enlightenment and the liberal tradition of the May-Fourth New Culture Movement. Meanwhile, Chen Qian, who was deeply influenced by the May-Fourth scholarship of mainland China, concentrated on describing the great momentum of the patriotic movement against imperialism and on how it achieved such a profound effect on Hong Kong. It was understandable that he rode the wave of popular anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism on the Mainland when he wrote his recollections, for he could hardly ignore the patriotic spirit of the May Fourth Movement moulded by the Chinese Communist Party. For those scholars who have recently followed in Chen Qian’s footsteps, most have been eager to write about his recollections in light of Hong Kong’s return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. It could be argued that the majority of that research tried to capitalize on the political environment and atmosphere of the time by using Chen Qian’s recollection to reimagine Hong Kong’s relationship with

42 He Guanhuan and Chen Wenfen 1993, 29.

the Mainland and to substantiate the perception of a collective history in which Hong Kong actively participated and supported the patriotic movements of the Communist Party.

Currently, there is an abundance of articles on the development of the May Fourth in Hong Kong. They not only strive to reveal the ugly underside of the colonial rule, but also to display the national consciousness and patriotism of Hong Kong's citizens under that colonial administration. Moreover, they attempt to shape the patriotic and anti-colonial discourse of May Fourth by criticizing the diabolical colonialism of Great Britain and the rampant imperialism of Japan, and by reinforcing the belief that "blood is thicker than water" with regard to Hong Kong's inhabitants and their China compatriots. They also focus on patriotism and national consciousness, and try to strengthen the sense of belonging and recognition. Above all, they convey the message that people from Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing were all patriotic and of one mind, further bringing Hong Kong into the national imagery and ideological framework of the "country" and "nation," and thus finally achieving the goal of consolidating the relationship between Hong Kong and its motherland.⁴³

Conclusion

To summarize, the May Fourth Movement only had a minor political impact on Hong Kong. The cultural impact of the movement, which was led by a minority of intellectuals and highlighted enlightenment and cultural progress, spread slowly both to and within Hong Kong. The New Culture movement had a very limited impact on Hong Kong for a long period of time until the 1930s. This was the reason why Chen Junbao, a student and supporter of the New Culture at the time, was regretful when he wrote his recollections more than 20 years later as a lecturer and librarian at the University of Hong Kong.

As Yu Yingshi 余英時 writes,

Until the brink of the Sino-Japanese War, academia on the Mainland was not willing to recognize the academic contributions of Hong Kong [...] the slighting attitude still could not be entirely altered even though the world had changed with the times.⁴⁴

Traditional academic circles historically believed that there were no outstanding scholars in Hong Kong except for several unknown Hanlin 翰林 scholars from the Qing Dynasty. As for the new academic circle based in Beijing and led by Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), the

43 See A Yi 1997, 74–75; Guangjiaojing 1989, 78–81, He Hongjing 1994, 117–118, Lin Qingyuan and Li Jingduan 1997, 96–98; Yang Xiaoshan 1996, 38–40.

44 Yu Yingshi 1998, 44.

movement of “reorganizing the national heritage” (*Zhengli guogu yundong* 整理國故運動) had a profound effect on the Mainland but made little, if any, progress and garnered no supporters in Hong Kong. It was not until Xu Dishan 許地山 (1893–1941) appeared on the academic scene of Hong Kong in the early 1930s that significant changes began to occur.

With regard to Hong Kong’s development, the political aspects of the May Fourth Movement have proven to be more influential than the cultural factors. In the future, more studies should be carried out to investigate why the new cultural and literary elements of the May Fourth Movement were developed slowly in Hong Kong and how the intellectuals of the Mainland criticized the traditional cultural environment of Hong Kong as well as how the new cultural movement has gradually affected Hong Kong in late 1930s. These topics will lay the foundation for much-needed research, and what I anticipate will be another paper.

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